

Superior Court of California County of Santa Clara

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Examination, Education, and Action: The Santa Clara County Superior Court Equality and Social Justice Committee

In response to racial injustice and inequality across our nation, state, and county, in August 2020, the Santa Clara County Superior Court established the Equality and Social Justice Committee. The purpose of this new committee is to critically examine inequality and systemic racism, as well as their impact on our nation's justice system, and to effectively take action to eliminate inequities and disparities in our court system.

Mission Statement for the Equality and Social Justice Committee:

This committee recognizes the impact of historical social injustices and systemic racism. This committee is committed to achieving an equitable system of justice for all. This committee will cultivate inclusivity, diversity, racial representation, and raise self-awareness through education, crucial conversations, community collaboration, and legislation.

Stemming from an educational and eye-opening Crucial Conversation series led by Judges Hon. Shelyna Brown and Hon. Charles Wilson, Presiding Judge, Deborah A. Ryan, convened the Equality and Social Justice Committee on behalf of the Superior Court.

In discussing the need for and mission of the committee, Presiding Judge Deborah A. Ryan said, "Our Court acknowledges that it must look within and determine how it can be an agent for good and of justice for all people. Without an examination of our own biases and blind spots, there can be no change. Our Court is taking the steps necessary to address the disparities that exist, educate ourselves and others, and put into action efforts necessary to eliminate inequities in our Court. There was an immediate and tremendous outpouring of support for and interest in serving on the committee by the judicial officers of the Court."

In forming and working on this committee, the Santa Clara County Superior Court is following the lead of California Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye, as well as all of the justices of California's Supreme Court.

Chief Justice Cantil-Sakauye stated, "As public servants, judicial officers swear an oath to protect and defend the Constitution. We must continue to remove barriers to access and fairness, to address conscious and unconscious bias – and yes, racism." The sentiments of the Supreme Court of California, as noted in a statement regarding equality and inclusion, affirmed their condemnation of "racism in all its forms: conscious, unconscious, institutional, structural, historic and continuing," and their commitment to "confront the injustices that have led millions to call for a justice system that works fairly for everyone."

The committee is chaired by Judges Shelyna Brown and Jacqui Duong, who bring great insight, enthusiasm, and leadership to this important court committee.

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The Equality and Social Justice Committee consists of six subcommittees:

The Education Subcommittee raises awareness among judicial officers on issues of equality and social justice. This committee will continue the Crucial Conversations series and other educational workshops and forums to accomplish this goal.

The Infrastructure Subcommittee identifies, develops, and implements plans to address internal culture, policies, and practices that support inequalities.

The Community Outreach Subcommittee engages and collaborates with local communities to identify and address inequalities. This committee will host educational forums/conferences on topics relating to equality and social justice to strengthen ties with the community.

The Legislation Subcommittee identifies and tracks information about legislation that affects the court system, including any justice reforms legislation.

The Leadership Subcommittee promotes diversity and inclusivity in the management of our Court. This committee will establish, develop, and support a leadership program for diverse individuals interested in management and supervision.

The Recruitment Subcommittee explores and provides avenues for bench officers to educate, inform, and recruit diverse candidates to become judicial officers.